

NER EEODAC
MINUTES OF THE MEETING
April 5, 2000

The NERO Equal Employment Opportunity/Diversity Advisory Committee (EEODAC) held a conference call on April 5, 2000. Persons representing Sandy Hook, Narragansett, New Bedford, Woods Hole, and Gloucester were present, including Jon Rittgers and John Boreman.

The Committee adopted the following agenda:

1. Status reports:
 - A. Minutes of last meeting
 - B. Workplans
 - C. Administration Sub-committee
 - D. Personnel Sub-committee
 - E. Policy Sub-committee
 - F. Program sub-committee
2. Diversity Initiatives
 - A. Liles draft query to labs
3. Review of NERO and NEFSC Workforces (Hendrickson)
4. Organizational matters
 - A. Committee structure vs. geographic distribution
 - B. conference calls vs meetings
5. Other Business

The Committee adopted the minutes of the March conference call without changes. The Committee then discussed the draft workplans of each sub-committee, which the Chairman had discussed with both Jon Rittgers and John Boreman. In so doing, the reports of each sub-committee were also made.

1. Status Reports

Policy Sub-committee:

Workplan 1: The Policy Committee proposed to: (1) gather and review existing EEO statistics specific to the NEFSC and the NERO, and (2) prepare a report regarding the data collection methodology, accuracy, and summarization of the these statistics with respect to EEO policies.

The deputy directors placed low priority on this proposal. The problem lies with the ways in which ethnic data are collected upon hiring. These numbers are relied upon to gauge NER'S performance in fulfilling Affirmative Action goals, but are voluntary and, when not supplied by the individual being hired, may be assigned to that person by someone handling that person's paperwork. The Committee agreed that it would be difficult to improve the accuracy of these data, which rely on self-reporting, but remained concerned about their accuracy. Members of the Committee wondered if it would be possible to have a category of "not indicated" if a person

chooses not to check off any ethnic group. A question was also asked as to whether a person could check more than one box, and, if so, how these data were handled in compiling statistics. The data would be more useful if sources of inaccuracy in the data are identified and if solutions to improve the data are proposed.

Workplan 2: The sub-committee proposed to review relevant NMFS and NOAA plans to implement EEO and to manage diversity. The proposed workplan calls for (1) the collection of EEO and diversity implementation plans, (2) the review of such plans by EEODAC members, and (3) summarizing comments on the plans for inclusion in the annual EEO reports of the region.

The deputy directors agreed that this would be a useful activity and approved this workplan. In addition, they requested that the Policy Sub-Committee report when there is no existing plan and recommend appropriate action.

Workplan 3: The sub-committee proposed to work with the Personnel Sub-committee to determine how the hiring process incorporates EEO policy. The chief questions are how the applicant pool is derived and how the successful candidate is selected. The sub-committee proposed to (1) meet with EASC staff to document the candidate rating and selection process, (2) prepare a summary of this process for the EEODAC, and (3) present its findings to the committee.

The committee discussed this workplan at length. The deputy directors agreed that it would be useful, but asked that it be expanded in scope to include specific recommendations on how to hold supervisors accountable for following EEO procedures. John Boreman made it clear that the EEODAC should not be doing the work of the supervisors. One member suggested that a checklist of steps that need to be taken to encourage the recruitment of minorities might be developed. A question was raised as to how EASC evaluates application packages. The committee asked if it could get guidelines from EASC as to how the review process works.

Personnel Sub-committee:

Workplan 1: The Personnel Sub-committee had also proposed to study hiring practices with the goal of increasing the diversity within NER/NEFSC. It proposed first to investigate the applicant pools to see if groups are under-represented in the pools. Then, if needed, it would compile a list of “tools” to increase the applicant pools. During the discussion, it became clear that we are not able to determine the background of persons in the applicant pools, because we are not allowed to use ethnicity as a factor in evaluating candidates.

The sub-committee was asked to develop this workplan further, working with the Policy Sub-committee, to include specific recommendations as to how to hold supervisors accountable for ensuring a diverse applicant pool and for justifying their final choice of applicants.

Workplan 2: The sub-committee proposed to work with EASC to make the present job application process less cumbersome and intimidating, as it was felt that the present process puts a premium on good writing skills and a facility with forms and paperwork, which could discourage good applicants from some jobs.

This was approved.

Workplan 3: The sub-committee proposed to suggest that a mentor be assigned to new, lower-grade professional employees to provide historical professional advice. Also, a junior-level rotational assignment program should be developed.

This workplan was approved in concept, but the sub-committee was asked to develop the concepts further. What would be the role of the mentor? What kinds of advice would that person be expected to provide? Would performance as a mentor be incorporated into a person's workplan? How often should a mentor meet with the new employee? How long should this formal relationship last? What kinds of rotational assignments did the sub-committee envision?

Administration Sub-Committee:

Workplan 1: The sub-committee's workplan proposed to review and edit the EEO Advisory Committee by-laws and Memorandum of Understanding and amend them to fit the current responsibilities and goals of the EEODAC.

This has already been completed. The deputy directors thanked the sub-committee for its work.

Program Sub-Committee:

Workplan 1: The sub-committee proposed to organize, implement, and continue with outreach programs that increase awareness of NOAA Fisheries in the local community of each laboratory or the regional office building.

The sub-committee was asked to develop this idea further. It was asked for a more detailed plan, especially explaining the kind of outreach it envisioned. There was a lengthy discussion of whether the EEODAC should be involved in all outreach/community relations activities or whether it should confine its consideration of outreach activities to efforts that target minorities. Boreman felt that the latter would be more useful. The Chairman promised to call Carolyn Stile to ask what kinds of outreach she had in mind when she encouraged the EEODAC to get involved with this kind of activity.

Workplan 2: The sub-committee proposed to gather scholarship information, particularly for minorities and disadvantaged students. The purpose would be to encourage pools of potential scientists in minority or financially disadvantaged groups that better reflect the diversity of the population.

The sub-committee was asked to modify this workplan to focus on ways to encourage current NMFS employees to take advantage of scholarships and other arrangements that encourage employees to continue with their studies. In particular, the deputies were interested in encouraging persons within NMFS to complete their undergraduate education.

Workplan 3: The sub-committee proposed to review present mechanisms for addressing access issues in the Region and Center.

This was approved, provided the sub-committee work closely with EASC and the facility managers at each location.

2. Diversity Initiatives

The committee discussed an initiative proposed by George Liles at the March meeting. The idea was for each location to send a message to employees at the site to ask for ideas about

what the diversity-related issues are and activities in which the Diversity Sub-committee should engaged. Liles advised that on further consideration it might not be effective to poll employees at this time. He opined that it would be better to take some action and get feedback on that action, rather than asking again what actions we should take. There was general agreement with this strategy.

The Committee then discussed how to structure the Diversity Sub-committee more effectively. Working as a large group comprised of virtually all EEODAC members made it cumbersome to hold discussions about specific tasks. The coordination of such a large group that covers several sites could hamper initiative and could result in actions that are not designed for maximum impact at each site. The committee decided that each facility should form its own diversity subcommittee, which would be responsible for developing activities at that location to encourage better management of diversity. Each group to select a contact person who will report to the EEODAC on its activities.

In this regard, Gloucester reported that it is setting up diversity awareness training. It had met earlier that day to plan for the event.

3. Review of NERO and NEFSC Workforces

Lisa Hendrickson presented an analysis of EEO statistics gathered from the Center and the Regional Office, compared to overall figures for the NMFS workforce. There was an extensive discussion of the implications of the statistics. Salient points were:

- There is a severe lack of information about the status of women and minorities in the Regional Office.
- With regard to overall representation of minorities and women, there are still inequalities, although some progress has been made in recruiting women.
- In 1999 there were 7 females and 13 males hired in the Center. None belonged to obvious minorities.
- Promotions in the Center were roughly proportional to the percentages of minorities, women and men.
- The transition from GS4 to GS 5 and from GS7-9 to GS 11-12 are particularly difficult steps to take.
- Care must be taken in interpreting these statistics, as they represent a snapshot in time and do not provide insight about trends over time. Also, it is not clear what the target performance or “measuring stick” should be when interpreting these statistics.

The Committee thanked Lisa for her extensive work in compiling and presenting the data. It agreed to try to provide advice on several specific questions. First, is there evidence that a “glass ceiling” exists? Second, are we making appropriate hiring decisions from an EEO point of view? Third, are there trends relating to hiring and retention of women and minorities in both the Center and the Regional Office?

The Committee recommended that the Regional Office increase significantly its efforts to collect data to monitor its performance under the Equal Employment Opportunity Act and the NOAA diversity plan.